

***Iowa Outdoors***  
**Iowa Department of Natural Resources**  
**www.iowadnr.com**

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**Oct. 21, 2003**

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Iowa's Favorite Gamebird Has Made an Amazing Comeback –

**THE STAGE IS SET FOR A BANNER PHEASANT OPENER**

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

DES MOINES--For outdoor enthusiasts the world over, few thrills compare to the explosive, heart pounding flush of a cackling rooster pheasant. By now, it's no secret that this year's pheasant opener promises to be a big one. Ask any farmer, rural mail carrier, or bus driver and they'll all give you the same story. The birds are out there, and they're out there big time.

"Things are looking very positive for Iowa pheasant hunting this year. So good, in fact, that hunters across most of northern and central Iowa can expect to enjoy the best season they've seen in ten years," says DNR wildlife biologist, Todd Bogenschutz.

According to Bogenschutz, the state's greatest pheasant densities will be found in the state's northwest region where the number of ring-necks increased a full 73 percent over last year. This year's count is the third highest ever recorded in the region. Pheasant numbers [in the northwest] are currently 50 percent above the 10-year average, and are 40 percent above the long-term average. It's simply the best of the best that Iowa has to offer.

Another top area to look for ring-necks is in the north central region of the state. Here, pheasants increased 53 percent over last year and are at the highest level since 1994. Pheasant populations are also abundant across most of central Iowa.

But regardless of how many roosters may currently be lurking in your favorite hunting hot spots, Opening Weekend success will be enhanced, or hindered, by two additional factors -- weather conditions and corn harvest.

For upland bird hunters, rain and excessive winds spell disaster. Fair skies and light breezes all but guarantee a roast pheasant for Sunday dinner. We'll just have to wait and see which conditions we get. After all, this is Iowa.

The status of this year's crop harvest is easier to predict. As of Monday, a little better than half of the state's corn was out of the field and in the bin. This is great news for pheasant hunters -- especially Iowa residents who will be tromping the fields the entire season.

Here's how it lays. Come Saturday's opener, enough corn will have been harvested to make good numbers of birds available to hunters. The other side of the shiny coin, is that there is also enough corn left standing to provide thousands of acres of temporary refuge. As the harvest continues, this will insure a new supply of roosters during the weeks ahead.

Any way you slice it, all signs point to a banner year for Iowa pheasant hunting.

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## **PHEASANT HUNTERS: BE WARY OF METH LABS**

Des Moines – With Iowa's pheasant population at a 10-year high, the roughly 225,000 pheasant hunters heading to the farm fields and pasture areas Saturday should expect a banner hunt. Unfortunately, some hunters will also stumble across the remains of meth labs.

"Meth is the worst drug that we've ever seen, and I've been at this for over 30 years," said an agent with the Division of Narcotics Enforcement (DNE) in the Department of Public Safety. "Nobody is immune from this drug."

Meth cooks spend the majority of the spring, summer and fall cooking the drug outdoors, in remote places in Iowa's countryside.

"As the harvest progresses, meth cooks will move from the cornfields to the ditches, under bridges, to abandoned farmsteads and to the timber," said Rod Slings, recreational safety program supervisor for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. "They are always looking for an out-of-the-way place to make it, and those places are also popular with hunters."

Slings said if hunters find a backpack or duffel bag laying in the field, they should leave it alone.

“Hunters would be well advised to not pick up or open a backpack or box or gas can laying out in the middle of nowhere. It was probably left there intentionally and probably has the remains of meth ingredients,” he said. “Don’t pick it up, don’t go near it. This is bad stuff and can be regenerated simply by picking it up or even moving it.”

“At first glance, many meth labs and meth lab dump sites resemble harmless trash or litter,” said Marvin Van Haaften, Director of the Governor’s Office of Drug Control Policy. “However, materials used to make meth may cause burns or respiratory problems if you touch the waste products or inhale gases that may spew from them.”

Other items hunters should be on the lookout for are coolers, thermoses and buckets. Slings said if someone sees any of these items, they should not touch anything, get out of the area immediately and call the local sheriff’s department, 911, or \*55 on their cell phone.

No clue is too small, Van Haaften said. It is vital that hunters and the public contact local law enforcement if they suspect suspicious behavior or activity.

“We routinely hear stories about someone finding a new gas can laying in the ditch and pick it up to take home and the chemicals inside explode injuring the person,” said another agent with DNE. “Even experienced law enforcement officers have gone to the hospital after handling these containers.”

Meth labs are no longer concentrated in central and southern Iowa. Agents have been raiding sites all across the state. If hunters come up on an active meth lab, the DNE advises them to not confront the cooks and to leave the area immediately.

“Meth cooks are by nature paranoid and violent,” the agent said. “They are getting more and more sophisticated and elusive.”

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## **DNR REMINDS PHEASANT HUNTERS OF FIRE RISK**

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Des Moines--Stop by any local coffee shop, grain elevator, or convenience store and it won't take long before you hear someone talking about pheasants and the upcoming hunting season.

Ring-necked pheasants are the nation's and, of course, Iowa's number one

gamebird. This year, Iowa pheasant numbers are up substantially. In some regions, current bird counts exceed both the 10-year and the long-term averages. It goes without saying that the bumper crop of roosters is certain to attract a bumper crop of hunters.

As always, DNR wildlife officials are stressing safety as tens of thousands of pheasant hunters take to the state's bird covers this weekend. Keep the muzzle of your shotgun pointed in a safe direction, use extra caution when negotiating ditches or crossing fences, and make sure your gun is empty before slipping it into the case and into the car.

This year, there's an additional safety reminder that may seem just a bit out of the norm. From border to border, in every single Iowa county, conservation officers and wildlife biologists are urging hunters to be aware of the state's extreme fire risk.

Field conditions are the driest they've been since the prolonged, blast furnace drought of the 1980s, and the entire state has become a giant tinderbox. During the past week, grass and stubble fires have become a too frequent occurrence. In northern Iowa, there have been at least two instances of combines "burning to the ground" after their engines ignited grass or dry corn leaves.

"This year it's going to be very important for hunters to be aware of fire concerns," said DNR Natural Resources Technician, Al Hancock. "Conditions are extremely dry, and the potential for accidents is great."

As always, common sense goes a long ways. Most hunters know enough not to play with matches or to carelessly knock their burning pipe ashes into a pile of dry vegetation. Less obvious, however, is the very real danger presented by hot truck engines, mufflers, or tail pipes.

"I think that most of the parking lots at public [hunting] areas are pretty clean and won't offer much of a risk," said Hancock.

"I think the greatest danger will be when pheasant hunters drive their vehicles out into the fields to hunt private lands. Catalytic converters are especially dangerous. Just driving out and parking a vehicle in dry grass could easily start a fire. Until the conditions change, hunters just can't be too careful."

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## **TIME IS RUNNING OUT TO ENTER EXPLORE IOWA PARKS CAMPING CONTEST FOR 2003**

The 2003 camping season is slowly coming to a close for most campers, but there is still time to get in those last few trips before winter closes roads and hardens the water.

That means campers have some time remaining to enter the Explore Iowa Parks camping contest.

The contest, which closes Oct. 31, is available to all campers visiting Iowa State Parks. Campers can qualify at three levels for prizes that reward them for camping at five, seven or 10 different state parks

Campers must keep their camping registration originals and mail them to DNR by Oct. 31. Campers who mail in registrations for five of the participating parks get a free subscription to the Iowa Conservationist, the colorful magazine published bi-monthly by DNR. Those who camp at seven parks get the subscription and a special parks t-shirt. Campers who make 10 different parks get those two prizes, plus a chance in a drawing for one year of free camping in Iowa State Parks, Recreation Areas and Forests; a Trek mountain bike or a \$100 gift certificate from Cabela's.

The mountain bike, valued at \$240, was donated by Bike World located in Des Moines, West Des Moines and Ames. The \$100 gift certificate was donated by Cabela's in Prairie du Chien, Wisc.

The Explore Iowa Parks program is open to residents and nonresidents. For more information go to [www.exploreiowaparks.com](http://www.exploreiowaparks.com).

**For more information, contact Greg Van Fosson at 515-281-6157.**

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## **WOODLAND STEWARDSHIP CONFERENCES-ILLINOIS, IOWA, MISSOURI AND WISCONSIN**

Two Woodland Stewardship Conferences for woodland owners and managers are being offered in March 2004. These conferences feature workshops presented by experts from Illinois, Iowa, Missouri and Wisconsin.

Conferences are offered March 13, at the Sinsinawa Conference Center in Sinsinawa, Wisc., and March 27, at the Grand Theater in Keokuk. These multi-state programs include a continental breakfast, conference breaks, lunch, conference materials and publications. Cost for each conference is \$35. Registration is required. Registration materials are available from county extension offices, District Foresters, Soil & Water Conservation District, and Natural Resource Conservation Service offices, your Extension Forester or may be downloaded at <http://www.ag.iastate.edu/departments/forestry/ext/fep.html> after January 1.

The conference in Keokuk offers four concurrent sessions. Workshop titles include Tree ID; Chain Saw Maintenance; Woodland Plants and Wildflowers; Nuisance

Wildlife; Forest Health Update; Thinning Walnut Plantations; Pruning Forest Trees; Control of Woodland Invasives; and 12 additional workshops.

The conference in Sinsinawa offers six concurrent sessions. Workshop titles include Inviting Birds to Your Property; Habitat Typing for Woodland Owners; Management of Oak Hickory Woodlands; Understanding Hardwood Log Grades; Riparian Buffers; Chain Saw Safety; Exotic Pests to Your Woodland; Creating Digital Forestry Images; and 22 additional workshops

The conference is co-sponsored by the Illinois, Iowa, Missouri and Wisconsin Extension Services; the Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin Departments of Natural Resources; the Missouri Department of Conservation, the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, and Wisconsin; the Department of Natural Resource Ecology and Management at Iowa State University; the University of Missouri School of Natural Resources; the University of Illinois Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences; and the Department of Forestry, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

For more information, contact Paul Wray, Extension Forester, Iowa State University, 515-294-1168 or by e-mail at [phw@iastate.edu](mailto:phw@iastate.edu).

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